

Litton will pay \$50,000 for alleged waste violations

By Keith White

Our Capital Bureau

JEFFERSON CITY — Litton Systems Inc. of Springfield has agreed to pay \$50,000 for alleged violations of the state hazardous wastes management law at its plant on West Kearney.

Under the terms of the consent decree filed Tuesday in Greene County Circuit Court, Litton will pay \$44,738 into the county school fund as required by law.

State officials will keep the other \$5,282 to cover expenses involved in investigating and closing down the storage lagoon last year.

Litton's payment is not a legal admission of guilt to charges it violated state law, but the payment will settle the 1982 lawsuit state officials brought against the company for those alleged violations.

State environmental officials charged Litton did not maintain the storage lagoon adequately, permitting some of the toxic wastes stored there to seep out of its walls.

Although state officials could not tie those toxic wastes to any contamination of nearby wells, they argued it would only be a matter of time if seepage continued.

In March 1982, Springfield city workers alerted the Department of Natural Resources to leaks in the earthen banks of the lagoon. City officials also discovered a sinkhole opening up nearby.

DNR officials declared an emergency and ordered Litton to lower the level of water in the lagoon.

Litton closed the lagoon after spending \$250,000 to drain and clean it up. Litton now removes pollutants at the plant and discharges the non-toxic wastewater into the Springfield city sewer system.

"To date, this is the largest settlement under the state's hazardous waste management law," Attorney General John Ashcroft said. "This substantial payment should place all companies on notice that the state will not allow violations of its hazardous waste laws."

Attorneys for the state had asked for the maximum \$10,000 fines against the company for every day it was found out of compliance with state hazardous waste laws.

In the lawsuit, the state alleged Litton failed to keep water levels in the lagoon at required levels, increased the lagoon's capacity by 25 percent without getting the required permit

and did not install a ground-water monitoring program to warn of possible contamination of ground water.

Fred Lafser, director of the state DNR, credited the settlement to department employees who administer the state's program of inspecting hazardous waste storage facilities.

"There are more than 100 of these facilities at plants throughout the state," Lafser said. "Quick action on the part of our field personnel prevented a real disaster."

Litton's plant at 4811 W. Kearney is operated by its advanced circuitry division. It manufactures circuit boards for electronic equipment.

At one time, Litton used the lagoon to store an estimated 10 million gallons of wastewater contaminated with heavy metals, detergents and ammonia used in the company's electroplating process, state officials said.

This is the second time in three years Litton has paid a fine in connection with state environmental laws.

In 1980, the state sued the Litton facility, alleging it had discharged wastewater from its lagoon into nearby sinkholes. Litton was later ordered to pay a \$20,000 civil fine in that case.

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